

## Documents of The Nguyen Dynasty's Mission to China in 1883: The Origins and Historical Values\*

Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy\*\*

### [ *Abstract* ]

In 1882, after the French defeated Tonkin for the second time, the Nguyen Dynasty led by King Tự Đức 嗣德 appointed Phạm Thiện Duật 范慎遜 and Nguyễn Thuật 阮述 as envoys to the Qing Dynasty to seek the Chinese's help to deal with the French invasion. The trip's information from 1883 such as the schedule, the content, the discussion, and the progress was specifically reflected in the two envoys' diaries, including "Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu" 建福元年如清日程 (Phạm Thiện Duật and Nguyễn Thuật), "Notes of Voyage to Tianjin" 往津日记 (Nguyễn Thuật). This article presents the origin of these documents and their historical values in order to provide insights into the study of diplomatic relations between the Nguyen Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty in the late 19th century through the 1883 mission.

**Keywords:** Phạm Thiện Duật, Nguyễn Thuật, Notes of Voyage to Qing, Notes of Voyage to Tianjin, Sino-Vietnamese Relationship

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\*\* Doctor, Hanoi National University of Education, [thuyn@hnue.edu.vn](mailto:thuyn@hnue.edu.vn).

## I . Introduction

In 1882, after the French defeated Tonkin for the second time, Li Hongchang 李鴻章 invited 2 - 3 Vietnamese to visit Tianjin to discuss the situation in Vietnam and to discuss about the way to deal with France. King Tự Đức 嗣德 appointed Phạm Thân Duật 范慎通 as the chief envoy and Nguyễn Thuật 阮述 as an assisting envoy on the mission to China with an aim to seek Chinese help to deal with the French's colonial invasion. The schedule as well as the work content and the developments of the embassy trip in 1883 were specifically reflected in the two envoys' diaries: "Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu" (NVQDFYJ) (Phạm Thân Duật and Nguyễn Thuật), "Notes of Voyage to Tianjin" (NVT) (Nguyễn Thuật). The origin and the content of the NVT have been presented in the studies of some Chinese scholars such as Chen Chingho 陈荆和, Gong Min 龚敏, Wang Zhiqiang 王志强, etc.

The article "Notes of Voyage to Tianjin by Nguyễn Thuật: the guide of academic connection through the survey of the archives at Rao Zongyi, the University of Hong Kong and the letters between Rao Zongyi and Paul Demiéville" of Gong Min (2011) can be considered as an elaborate and clear study representing work on the process of collecting and publishing NVT in Hong Kong. The author's use of the term "academic predestination" here implies that for more than half of the twentieth century, after being collected and stored in three different places (Vietnam, France and Hong Kong), the NVT were preserved, annotated and published by three famous Sinologists. Thanks to that, NVT was able to reach researchers outside of Vietnam.

Regarding the article "A Review of "Notes of Voyage to Tianjin" an Its Historical Value" Wang (2010: 72) affirms:

The work "NVT is a valuable cultural document as it provides new perspectives in the research on the history of China - Vietnam relations in modern times and historical bases for in-depth research on the activities of the Chinese boat Zhaoshang Department along with materials studying Vietnamese - Chinese cultural exchanges. The fact that Nguyễn Thuật went to the Qing dynasty was mentioned in the NVT, and it reflected Chinese - Vietnamese relationship, from

form to content. The content being that of the “suzerain-vassal 宗藩” relationship between the two countries; particularly, it has clearly shown that the feudal dynasties of Vietnam hoped to break the traditional tributary structure, so it wanted to find out the world’s opinion to get rid of the current state bondage.

In the work “Comparison of “Notes of Voyage to Tianjin” and “Notes of Voyaye to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu”, Wang (2012: 59) also affirms that:

In terms of name, although NVT is private (while NVQDFYJ is official, which was written by two people and narrated the tasks), it has richer content than NVQDFYJ, with more cultural and historical values, and receives more interest and research by international scholars. Of course, if both these books can be combined, they will have the effect of supplementing and correcting one another on historical events in the Chinese-Vietnamese relations in modern times.

It can be said that the articles of Wang Zhiqiang are worth referencing, contributing to the reader’s further understanding about the historical values and the influence of NVT in terms of researching the Chinese - Vietnamese relations in late nineteenth century. However, the detailed research of these two diaries as a source of historical information for the learning of the trip in 1883 has not been systematically mentioned. Based on the inherited research achievements of previous scholars, this article presents documents about the mission trip in 1883 by the Vietnamese envoys. The article further affirms the multifaceted value of NVQDFYJ and NVT; in terms of history, place, literature, and language; in the research literature regarding the mission trip in particular and Vietnamese - Chinese relations in modern times in general; by presenting the historical values and illustration of some specific contents in the two diaries about the journey taken by the mission envoys, about the content and results of the mission trip, about the cultural exchange between Vietnam and China and Japan. This article also provides insights for the study of diplomatic relations between the Nguyen Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty particularly and some historical issues of Vietnam and China in the

late nineteenth century broadly.

## II. Documentation and circulation process

There are two copies of NVQDFYJ. The first one, with 126 pages containing the seal of the Library of French School of the Far East (École française d'Extrême - Orient), is archived at the Institute of Sino - Nôm 漢喃 Studies, symbolized A929, and bears the title of “Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu” 建福元年如清日程 on the cover. The second one is marked A1471 and has the title “Notes of Voyage to Tianjin” 往使天津日記 on the cover, with a total of 112 pages. Although the difference is 14 pages, the main content of the two copies is the same, and only the font size is different. In the A929 copy, the Appendix also has three schematic maps of Tianjin 天津, Hong Kong 香港, and Shanghai Concession 上海租界, so the number of pages is a little higher.

In China, NVQDFYJ is known as a work in the Vietnamese works “Yuenan Hanwen Yanxing wenxian jicheng” 越南漢文燕行文獻集成 (including 25 volumes that Fudan University Press published in 2010) compiled by the National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies 復旦大學文史研究院 in cooperation with Institute of Sino - Nôm Studies (collected by Vietnam). In this book, NVQDFYJ was photocopied from the A929 copy - “Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu” 建福元年如清日程 (referred to as “Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty” 如清日程). Therefore, in China, this diary has been circulated with the popular name of “Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty” 如清日程 or “Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu” 建福元年如清日程.

In Vietnam, NVQDFYJ has been translated and published in the two works: “Phạm Thân Duật: Life and Works” (Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House, 1989) and “Complete works of Phạm Thân Duật” (Hanoi: Culture and Information Publishing House, 2000). In the introduction, the translators also present the origin of NVQDFYJ:

At the current Sino - Nôm library, there are two Chinese copies with

the same content, the same size of 20x30 cm paper, each page includes 9 rows, 18 words and obviously are later copies, but there are some differences in details:

- “Notes of Voyaye to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu” 建福元年如清日程, symbolized A929, with 63 sheets (126 pages – author’s note). The main content consists of 52 sheets, including 3 schematic maps of Tianjin, Hong Kong 香港, and Shanghai Concession 上海租界. The last part is called the “Zhong chao dingzhi” 中朝定制 (Institutions of the Qing Dynasty in China), which is actually a record of some miscellaneous things found in China. Because it is a copy, there are still some words left blank, which is probably due to the unclear origin.
- “Notes of Voyage to Tianjin” 往使天津日記, A1471, with 56 sheets (112 pages – author’s note). The main content consists of 45 sheets, with no maps, but there are few words left blank and more notes. Therefore, we use this copy to translate (with reference to A929 copy) and use the name of this copy because it is more suitable (Pham 1989: 287).

Therefore, in Vietnam, the copy called “Notes of Voyage to Tianjin” 往使天津日記 is more popular. NVT has complicated process in comparison with NVQDFYJ. The current printed/ scanned copy of the books; archived in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China; is noted by Chen Chingho based on a copy of NVT kept by Paul Demiéville. After that, NVT was published in 1980 by the Chinese University Press in Hong Kong. Apart from the main content written by Nguyễn Thuật, the book includes Preface 代序 and Commentary 解說 of Chen Chingho and Postscript 阮荷亭《往津日記》鈔本跋 of Rao Zongyi 饶宗颐.

It can be said that the book NVT in its original publishing was associated with the names of many French and Chinese Sinologists and represented an interest to the Chinese Sinologists. Research of Gong Min about the aforementioned book, its retention and publishing process shows the following basic points:

- a. Nguyễn Thuật’s current copy of NVT was originally from 1887.
- b. Nguyễn Thuật’s copy of NVT was found by Paul Demiéville in Hanoi, Vietnam in the period of 1920 – 1924. In 1930, he brought

this book to France and kept it privately in his home.

c. In 1966, Rao Zongyi received Paul Demiéville's book during his visit at an academic exchange in Paris.

d. During the period of 1968-1973, Rao Zongyi wrote the Postscript for NVT.

e. In 1975, Rao Zongyi sent the epilogue of NVT to Paul Demiéville to ask for suggestions, and at the same time convey the words of Chen Chingho stating that this book is very valuable and hopes that it would be revised for publication. Later, Rao Zongyi sent letters to Paul Demiéville several times to express concern about the publication of this book.

f. In the spring of 1976, Rao Zongyi went to Paris for the third time to return this book to Paul Demiéville. Paul Demiéville then asked Chen Chingho to translate it for publication. In August 1977, Rao Zongyi revised the "Epilogue" in the book and read it at the Seventh Asian Historian's Conference. This was the first research thesis on NVT.

g. In June 1978, Chen Chingho visited Paris for the second time. Paul Demiéville expressed his belief that the book was currently the only original, and he hoped that the book would soon be published.

h. In 1980, NVT noted by Chen Chingho was published by Hong Kong Chinese Publishing House. Unfortunately, Paul Demiéville died in March 1979 with no chance of seeing the book published (Gong 2011: 48).

### III. The author

Many Vietnamese researchers believe that: NVQDFYJ is the work of Phạm Thiện Duật, while NVT is the work of Nguyễn Thuật. The evidence lies in the two selected works of Phạm Thiện Duật: "Phạm Thiện Duật: Life and Works" (Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House, 1989) and "Complete works of Phạm Thiện Duật" (Hanoi: Culture and Information Publishing House, 2000). NVQDFYJ was also printed into a book and considered as a work of Phạm Thiện Duật.

Researchers in the work "Vietnamese Chinese Yanxing literature integration" demonstrated that: NVQDFYJ is the common

work of Nguyễn Thuật and Phạm Thận Duật (National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies, Institute of Hán - Nôm Studies and National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies复旦大学文史研究院 2010: 173-174). The basis for the explanation is contained in the “Introduction” and “Conclusion” of NVQDFYJ which clearly shows the log taking the title of Phạm Thận Duật and Nguyễn Thuật to be submitted for royal consideration (Pham 1989: 287).

Researcher Chen Chingho (Vietnamese research specialist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong), by comparing pen strokes and decipheration, affirmed that the work NVT is Nguyễn Thuật's.

#### IV. Historical value

NVT and NVQDFYJ have an important value in providing new perspectives in researching the diplomatic relations between Vietnam and China in the early modern period through the trip schedule of the Nguyen Dynasty's envoy. It also presents the cultural exchanges between Vietnam, China and Japan; about the operation of Zhaoshang Department of the Qing Dynasty,... This study will discuss in more detail the value of this document:

##### 4.1. The trip schedule

The mission of Phạm Thận Duật and Nguyễn Thuật to China in 1883 was summarized both in NVT and NVQDFYJ (Pham 1989; Nguyen & Chen 1980):

<Table 1> The trip schedule of the Nguyen Dynasty's envoy

<i>Member of envoy delegation</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Route</i>	<i>Tasks</i>
Imperial Duty Envoy: Nguyễn Thuật Attache: Nguyễn Tịch阮籍, Đỗ Phú Tú杜富肅, Lê Đăng Trinh李登貞	- Arrival at Guangdong廣東 on 12/2/1883 - Departure from Guangdong on 1/3/1883	Starting from Da Nang port, transit in Nanhai 南海 bound for Hong Kong and then transit in Hong Kong bound for Guangdong	Present the credentials to the governor named Zeng Guoquan 曾國荃

<i>Member of envoy delegation</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Route</i>	<i>Tasks</i>
Imperial Commissioner acting as Chief Envoy: Phạm Thận Duật; Imperial Commissioner acting as Assistant Envoy: Nguyễn Thuật; Attache include: Nguyễn Tịch, Nguyễn Đăng Trinh, Đỗ Phú Túc, Nguyễn Văn Hữu阮文有, Phan Du潘瑜.	- Arrival in Tianjin on 17/3/1883 - Departure from Tianjin on 23/11/1883	Starting from Đà Nẵng port, transit in Nanhai bound for Hong Kong and then transit in Henan河南bound for Guangdong, from Hong Kong to Guangdong. From Guangdong return to Hong Kong to go to Shanghai and then to Tianjin.	Ask the situation before Li Hongchang and the French Envoy Bourrée negotiate and give a resolution on the issues of Vietnam.

NVT recorded that the embassy trip started from January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (December 8<sup>th</sup> in the 35<sup>th</sup> year of Tự Đức (1882)) and ended on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1884 (December 29<sup>th</sup>, in the 36<sup>th</sup> year of Tự Đức (1883))<sup>1</sup>. NVQDFYJ recorded that the mission started from January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (December 21<sup>st</sup> in the 35<sup>th</sup> year of Tự Đức (1882)) and ended on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1884 (December 29<sup>th</sup>, in the 36<sup>th</sup> year of Tự Đức (1883)). Thus, the beginning of the trip in 1883 as it was recorded in the works of Nguyen Thuat is not the same. NVT started on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1883 while NVQDFYJ started on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1883. Thus, NVT is 13 days earlier than NVQDFYJ.

This difference is due to the fact that Nguyễn Thuật and Phạm Thận Duật did not come to China at the same time. King Tự Đức initially only sent Nguyễn Thuật to China. On January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1883, Nguyễn Thuật took the order of the mission to Hong Kong and Guangzhou 廣州. On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1883, 13 days later, King Tự Đức issued a new edict, ordering Phạm Thận Duật to be the chief envoy, and Nguyễn Thuật to be the assistant envoy to Tianjin. Both would be present, together with Li Hongchang and the French envoy, to

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of consistency, here we use a day according to the solar calendar, with brackets to note the equivalent in the lunar calendar, which is mentioned in two diaries.



negotiate on the issue of Vietnam. In fact, on January 29<sup>th</sup>, when Phạm Thiện Duật started the trip from Vietnam, Nguyễn Thuật had already arrived in Qiong Zhou Haikou 瓊州海口 (Haikou海口 City, Hainan Province today) two days prior (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 21). On February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1883, Nguyễn Thuật and Phạm Thiện Duật met in Guangzhou. Thus, over a period of more than one month, the two ran their missions separately. Therefore, the diary content differs from one another in this period.

This difference between the two diaries can supply information that provides researchers with a better understanding of the 1883 mission. Specifically, based on records in NVT, we know that Phạm Thiện Duật and his companions used Fuji ship 普濟輪 of Zhaoshang Department 招商局<sup>2</sup> as the transport vehicle. This clarified the means of transportation which was missing in NVT.

About the end of the mission, NVT and NVQDFYJ ended the embassy trip on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1884 (December 29<sup>th</sup>, in the 36<sup>th</sup> year of Tự Đức (1883)).

Although the end of the mission is the same, interestingly enough, the two diaries recorded with discrepancy in the last half of the month of the trip. The return trip of Phạm Thiện Duật and Nguyễn Thuật began on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1884 (December 8<sup>th</sup>, in the 36<sup>th</sup> year of Tự Đức (1883)), and they arrived in Bình Định 評定 Province, Vietnam four days later. However, on January 12<sup>nd</sup>, 1884 (December 15<sup>th</sup>, in the 36<sup>th</sup> year of Tự Đức (1883)), Phạm Thiện Duật relapsed on his chronic disease and had to stop in Bình Định for treatment. Nguyễn Thuật and his other missionaries continued to return to the capital on the same day. This has translated into the difference in the content of the two diaries over a period of around a half month. NVT departed from Bình Định on the 12<sup>nd</sup> and arrived in Huế 順華 ancient capital on the 26<sup>th</sup>. However, the diary of this half - month is remarkably simple, just records the places he has gone through, and there are 6 days without any record. By contrast, NVQDFYJ of Phạm Thiện Duật during this time includes a richer

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<sup>2</sup> Zhaoshang Department 招商局: a Chinese agency, nominally established as a trading agent but in fact serves to grasp the situation in Vietnam, like the consulate established in 1877 in the capital of Hue and has a branch in some other places.

content. Alongside the monotonous parts, the diary (as the A929 copy) recorded both places that Phạm Thân Duật visited, particularly the natural landscapes which indicated his passionate love for Vietnamese nature. This difference supplemented not only the work of Nguyễn Thuật but also provided information on the natural geographic situation of Vietnam in the late nineteenth century.

#### **4.2. The nature and the end of the “Emperor 天子” - “vassal 諸侯” relationship between Vietnam and China**

After arriving in Tianjin, the Vietnamese diplomatic corps was scheduled to meet with Li Hongchang<sup>3</sup> - who was assigned to oversee Vietnamese affairs by the Qing Dynasty. On March 24, 1883 (according to the lunar calendar in NVQDFYJ, it was on February 16), Phạm Thân Duật and Nguyễn Thuật had an audience with Li Hongchang. The two parties held a written conversation and frankly exchanged many issues, including the situation concerning the signing of the treaty between Vietnam and France, the situation of preventing trade by Lưu Vĩnh Phúc 劉永福 and Vietnam's defense plan (Wang 2011: 63).

During the written conversation, although Phạm Thân Duật made it clear that the road defense was something that the Nguyen Dynasty court could not ignore. However, the difficulty lied in the waterway, because the French ships and artillery were very strong, and the strength of Vietnam could not hold a candle to that. Therefore, the diplomatic corps reported to the Qing Dynasty and Li Hongchang to ask for help and rescue, but Li Hongchang ended the meeting with a very indifferent and unclear attitude: “Currently, France is not willing to negotiate with China on Vietnamese affairs and only listen to some things. I have already applied for a leave to go back to my hometown to take care of a funeral<sup>4</sup>, and I do not

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<sup>3</sup> Li Hongchang (1823 - 1901): an imperial minister of the late Qing Dynasty. He was one of the main leaders of the Duong vu movement. He served as governor and was also the founder of the Chinese navy, shipbuilding, and mechanical engineering bureau. He worked as a mandarin holding many important positions, including the position of BaiYang trade high-ranking mandarin, and WenHua temple scholar. He was recognized with the familiar name of Li Zhongtang (the position of Prime Minister).

<sup>4</sup> Implied that Li Hongchang's mother passed away. Li Hongchang had to take leave to return to his hometown to mourn his mother.

know how many days I'll be gone. You guys just wait here [ie Tianjin], do not rush to return home" (Wang 2011: 61 - 63).

Thus, Li Hongchang made it clear to the Vietnamese envoys that the France had reversed the previously discussed things and did not want to discuss the Vietnamese affairs with China anymore. It was not possible for Vietnam to join France and China to discuss the Vietnamese affairs.

Anyway, the motive and the underlying cause for Li Hongchang's cold and negative attitude towards the Vietnamese affairs still requires access to documents and consideration from many aspects. However, in reality, it is true that Li Hongchang ignored and didn't want to have much contact with the Vietnamese diplomatic corps. After the meeting mentioned above, the Vietnamese diplomatic corps had asked to receive Li Hongchang many times but failed, all communication was mainly done through written conversations with Ma Phuc Bon. In the NVQDFYJ, the following phrases are constantly being repeated "Based on the content of the written conversation with the Ambassador Ma [ie Ma Tieya馬鐵崖]...". Every time when there was Li Hongchang's opinion, the Vietnamese envoy team answered very carefully in writing but "the Central Palace only received national letters, did not accept our report to answer questions given by the Central Palace" (Pham 1989: 357).

Accompanying the cold attitude was Li Hongchang's neglect of the war situation in Vietnam. With the policy of "Defense and happening observation" (firmly defending, just observing the situation but not mobilizing), Li Hongchang took no action, despite the French's assault on the Thuận An estuary. The Nguyen Dynasty had to sign the Harmand treaty in 1883, acknowledging the French protection over all of Vietnam.

On July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1883, the King Tự Đức died when the issue of Vietnam in the negotiations between France and the Qing Dynasty remained unresolved. Recognizing that the attitude of the Qing Dynasty towards Vietnam was "just a concern" (seen from a distance) for a long time, France decided to use force to attack Huế, forcing the Nguyen Dynasty to sign the Harmand Treaty on August

25<sup>th</sup>, 1883, acknowledging the protection of France over Vietnam.

Before that, on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1883 (September 27<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar), Phạm Thân Duật, Nguyễn Thuật and the envoy delegation found out that staying in Tianjin was no longer helpful for the country anymore. They thus asked the Qing Dynasty to let them return to Vietnam. NVQDFYJ recorded this event as follows:

We composed a statement to apply for the returning to the country and asked Ambassador Ma馬 to submit it to Li Zhongtang 李中堂 (Li Hongchang – author’s note). After that, the Ambassador Ma (Ma Tieya 馬鐵崖 – author’s note) returned and brought with him a telegraph (stating that the French troops took over the fortress on the Thuận An coast 順安訊 and that Vietnam and France were discussing the reconciliation). Based on the criticism of the Zhongtang [On the telegraph], we appointed people to copy [the telegraph] and prepare our statement to save and submit it to Li Zhongtang (Pham 1989: 317).

In the context that the French conquered Vietnam, on November 12, 1883, Li Hongchang relied on the following reason: “The envoys in Tianjin, now there is no more negotiation, so it is necessary to be ready to return to your country to avoid waiting for a long time” (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 56), to grant the request of the Vietnamese envoy team to return home from Thiên Tân.

In NVT, Nguyễn Thuật expressed his disappointment of the attitude of the Qing Dynasty as follow:

The Qing Dynasty sent a dispatch expressing the desire to negotiate the issues between my country and France, and also summoned us to Tianjin for interrogation, but the explanation was unsuccessful, and they delayed to use force to support my country when it was in trouble. This led to the French forcing us to reconcile. This time my country experienced a great event, and the situation could not fail to be followed up. The Qing Dynasty did not protect the border country, and did they have any words to explain to the world? If the situation has come to this, then what else can they say! (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 49).

Even when the delegation left, Phạm Thận Duật offered a letter asking to meet Li Hongchang to say goodbye but he also made excuses to avoid it. November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (October 13<sup>rd</sup> of the lunar calendar):

Upon receiving the official dispatch from Zhongtang (the approval for the envoys to return to the country) entrusted to us to open, we immediately wrote the statement to offer the visit to say goodbye. The statement was delivered to the Ambassador Ma to submit to Li Zhongtang and Zhou 周 in the customs. That evening, we met Ambassador Ma and he said that Li Zhongtang was very busy these days, could not receive us. As for Zhou, he was ill. He sent people to deliver letters and perform the rituals to see us off (Pham 1989: 322–323).

On November 23, 1883, the Vietnamese envoy team led by Chief envoy Phạm Thận Duật landed a boat to return home, marking that the noble mission entrusted by the Nguyen Dynasty failed. The mission trip of Phạm Thận Duật and Nguyễn Thuật in 1883 carried a great mission in the context of Vietnam being in danger of complete annexation by France. That mission was the Nguyen dynasty's hope in seeking help from the Qing Dynasty, China regarding both diplomatic and military action. As the King's Chief envoy of the special envoy, Phạm Thận Duật tried his best with the special task that King Tự Đức assigned to the mission. However, times changed, and the Qing court represented by Li Hongchang refused to help, welcoming the diplomatic corps with a cold attitude along with lack of positivity. The result of that trip went against the hope and efforts of Phạm Thận Duật and the diplomatic corps, making the mission of the diplomatic corps a failure.

This event can be seen as a “sanctity removal” for the Qing dynasty – the dynasty that always considered itself “the royal dynasty” and had the role of protecting countries which they considered “vassal kingdom”. The fact that the Qing dynasty took no action, implemented the policy of “defense and happening observation” to let the French force, intimidate and strike the Hue capital city of Vietnam clearly demonstrated the choice of strategic

“abandonment” of Vietnam. This choice, according to Wang (2011: 64), reflected the realism in the foreign policy of the Qing court. That kind of realism is also a matter, of course, in the implementation of the comprehensively shrinking policy of the Qing Empire.

After this mission trip, the team of intellectuals and officials of the Nguyen Dynasty had a more accurate view of the Qing Dynasty (even though it was a late redirection!). More than ever, the desire of self - strengthening to escape Chinese influence and have enough strength to oppose the French colonialism, to defend the national independence was burning and proved its correctness in reality more than ever. According to Wang Zhiqiang and Quan Hexiu (2011: 85), the failure of Phạm Thân Duật's diplomatic corps to achieve the desired result was the end of the relationship in the “suzerain - vassal 宗藩” style between “the royal dynasty” and the so called “vassal kingdom”. Since this event, the relationship between Vietnam and China in particular and the traditional “suzerain - vassal 宗藩” relationship institution in Southeast Asia in general with taking China as a center have begun to shift to a new modern model.

### **4.3. Events related to Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese cultural exchanges**

#### **4.3.1. Cultural exchanges between Vietnam and China**

On February 11<sup>st</sup>, 1883 (January 4<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar), while the delegation of Phạm Thân Duật arrived at the Qiong Zhou Haikou, Nguyễn Thuật's delegation was in Guangzhou. Here, Nguyễn Thuật and the delegation were instructed by Shi Qingquan 石清泉 and Ruan Mengxian 阮夢仙 to see the torpedo cannon<sup>5</sup> 水雷礮 in the Qiu Long 九龍 mountain by ship. On that occasion, Nguyễn Thuật asked Shi Qingquan, who held the position of Admiral managing

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<sup>5</sup> Torpedo cannon: using explosive-wrapped oil paper, every three bag is wrapped into a bundle, covered with oil paper outside, and connected to the detonator wrapped with black cloth on the top. After igniting the detonator, the torpedo cannon will explode in the water, causing the surrounding water to turn black. The sound of the explosion sounded like thunder, many dead fish will float on the surface of the water (See details in: Sun 2010: 67).

Cantonese artillery for the operation principle of underwater torpedo cannon. Shi Qingquan said that Chinese torpedo cannons were mostly bought from Germany. This type of cannon was cast in bronze, contained explosives and placed in the water like a fish. Once you have correctly determined the target when you are at war, it was possible to explode an enemy boat when you fire (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 24). The search made Nguyễn Thuật felt excited and well aware of the benefits of Western weapons.

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1883 (January 16<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar), NVQDFYJ only recorded: “Guangdong governor ordered chief of Nanhai District to send soldiers to guard the outside of the embassy” (Pham 1989: 293; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 26 - 27). NVT also recorded that Nguyễn Thuật, Phạm Thân Duật and his envoys visited the Guangdong Department of Mechanics 廣東機器局. Nguyễn Thuật was surprised to find out that everyone who worked in The Guangdong Department of Mechanics was Chinese. In particular, the person in charge of this department is Wen Zichao 溫子紹 - a person who had never studied in the West, but he had a high level of “Western Studies”, which was considered a talented person in the world (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 27).

On April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (March 10<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar), NVQDFYJ wrote:

In the morning, Phạm Thân Duật and the interpreter Huy spoke to Tang Daoyuan 唐道員 (Tang Yingxing 唐應星 – author’s note) to ask about the work. In the evening, he received Tang Daoyuan at the embassy. Zhaoshang Department said that the French Consul did not agree to allow the Fuji ship to ship rice. Zhang Gung 張龔 ordered the officer to return to Guangdong to work as a clerk the next day (Pham 1989: 304; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 33).

NVT in addition to copying the event at Zhaoshang Department to visit Tang Yingxing 唐應星 and 黃花農Huang Huanong, it also wrote the fact that Huang Huanong led him to visit the Telegraph Department 電報局 - a division of Zhaoshang Department. Nguyễn Thuật has described specifically the layout in the Telegraph Department (Pham 1989: 310; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 33 - 34). Nguyễn Thuật and the Vietnamese envoy delegation were

also shown the way to respond to the signals “quickly” at the Telegraph Department. Huang Huanong asked the news from Dajie Kou 大潔口: “Is there a boat coming to Dajie Kou today?” Then he immediately got the answer from Dajie: “Today there is no boat”. Then they heard the sound vibrating from Shanghai’s telegraph column, and immediately saw Shanghai department asking: “How is the work today?” The other immediately replied: “Today, Vietnamese envoys visit the Department...”. Nguyễn Thuật expressed his amazement: The distance from Tianjin to Dajie is more than 100 miles, to Shanghai is more than 2,000 miles, but the information came in just a few moments, which is miraculous. Nguyễn Thuật and the Vietnamese envoy delegation were surprised by the magic of Western technology (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 33 - 34).

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (April 12<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar), NVQDFYJ recorded the event of Nguyễn Thuật and the envoy delegation watching the soldiers of the Atlantic artillery train:

Nguyễn Thuật and his followers Lê Trinh, Đỗ Phú Túc went to the land of Yaowo 窑窩 outside the North gate, watching soldiers’ manoeuver on the sea. There were four units participating in the manoeuver (including middle, half-back, right back and guard). Every day they maneuvered twice, in the morning and in the afternoon, and there were two thousand soldiers involved. The clothes of the soldiers were all black, their shoes were also black, their walking was no different from the Western soldiers. They arranged in a formation, either a fish-shaped formation<sup>6</sup> (Each team has about a hundred people, ten have a decurion, a hundred people have a star leader) or a swallow-wing shape (the formation is divided into three rows, each with no more than 700 people). Sometimes they all stood, sometimes the front row knelt followed by the two rows behind it standing up, and then they all shot. At that time, their hand acted like one: cocking a gun and loading a gun were very proficient, as thousands of people did the same thing. Their general teacher<sup>7</sup>, Cha Zihe 查子和, had previously gone to France to study for four years. Upon returning to the country, [he] followed the French training [to guide soldiers]. The commander of the military camps, Huang Lizhuan 黄麗川, invited us to observe the

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<sup>6</sup> fish-shaped ballte: fighting formation like “fish” word

<sup>7</sup> General teacher: Training general teacher



manoeuvre, and came back in the evening. (Pham 1989: 307–308; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 38).

In addition to the above information, NVT also recorded the feeling of Nguyễn Thuật after witnessing this event: “The Qing Dynasty has the intention to study the West like that, so is the acquisition of scientific achievements not difficult?” (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 38).

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (May 2<sup>nd</sup> of the lunar calendar), NVQDFYJ recorded briefly: “Delegating to Dang Duc Huy 邓德辉 to send a dispatch to Zhaoshang Department” (Pham 1989: 310; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 40). NVT clearly stated that the Vietnamese delegation recommended that Vietnam should buy Yangpao 洋礮 (Western artillery), and Yangqiang 洋鎗 (Western gun) (Nguyen & Chen 1980: 40) to practice in the new way of Western guns. The above aspirations of Nguyễn Thuật and the Vietnamese envoy delegation clearly reflected more or less the zeal and expectation of the king and mandarins of the Nguyen Dynasty at that time. They wanted to acquire and learn Western science and technology via China, intending to create self - reliant power to restore and make the country strong. Commenting on this desire of Nguyễn Thuật, Sun (2010: 43) writes:

For Vietnam, Nguyễn Thuật and the envoy delegation clearly felt the suffering when being invaded by the colonialists. He realized the connection between his country's fate and China's, and, based on the effect of the Yangwu 洋务 movement, saw the need for learning Western technique. He hoped that China and Vietnam could fight against the invasion, and hoped to study/imitate China in Western science and technology to make the country rich and strong, proceeding to maintain independence for the nation

#### **4.3.2. Cultural exchanges between Vietnam and Japan**

While taking a ship in Shanghai on his return trip, Phạm Thiện Duật and Nguyễn Thuật had contact with Japanese Naval Officer Shōun Sone 曾根肅雲 three times. This is recorded by NVQDFYJ as follows:

The first contact on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (November 6<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar):

The person receiving the Japanese is Shōun Sone (title of Naval mandarin sent to Shanghai for work). The two parties held a written conversation. He showed a record of the events in our country a few years ago by a Japanese editor, his “France – Vietnam Jiaozheng Ji” 法越交争記 and “Nan Piao jishi” 南漂記事. We made full copies to read. (Pham 1989: 325; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 59).

The second contact on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (November 7<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar):

Received Shōun Sone and held written conversation. He gave us two painted wooden trays, four shield – shaped trays, one Xingya Hui 興亞會, a program of Xingya Hui, a see – off poem with the ancient style of poetry. We received the gifts and gave a poem in response. (Pham 1989: 325–326; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 59).

The third contact on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1883 (November 8<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar):

That evening, we received the Shōun Sone. Held written conversation and he gave three boxes of medicine for eye pain with Guang Ming 光明 brand and several texts with very good handwriting. (Pham 1989: 326; Nguyen & Chen 1980: 59–60).

Besides contacting Naval mandarin Shōun Sone, Phạm Thận Duật and Nguyễn Thuật also met with three other Japanese monks. Through written conversation between Phạm Thận Duật, Nguyễn Thuật and intellectuals, the Japanese monks have found the similarities in the two countries' culture (Japanese monks also cut short hair, wear robes like monks in Vietnam, both countries have a long tradition of literature and Buddhism and use Chinese 漢子,...).

In addition to the points mentioned above, NVQDFYJ and NVT also provided important information about the form and nature of the “Emperor 天子” – “Vassal 諸候” relationship between Vietnam and China in history, the embassy trip to China of Vietnamese envoys, and activities and the role of Zhaoshang Department of Qing Dynasty, etc. Analyzing the historical values of NVT, Wang (2010: 71) evaluated:

NVT is a valuable cultural document that can provide new perspectives on the study of Sino – Vietnamese relation's history till modern times, providing a historical basis for the in-depth study of

the Chinese Zhaoshang Department's operations as well as materials for studying Vietnamese – Chinese cultural exchanges. That value is well worth for the academic circle to mind and to focus.

Regarding the historical values of NVT for the study of Sino – Vietnamese relations at the end of the nineteenth century, Wang (2010: 72) continued to affirm:

The event of Nguyễn Thuật going to the Qing Dynasty documented in NVT reflects the reality of Sino – Vietnamese relations, both the form and content of the “suzerain-vassal 宗藩” relations between the two countries. In particular, it is clear that the Vietnamese feudal dynasties hoped to break the traditional tribute structural framework but wanted to borrow the world's opinion to escape the current state of bondage of the country.

In the comparison between NVQDFYJ and NVT, Wang (2012: 59) said:

Nominally, although NVT is private (different from NVQDFYJ which has stately nature because it was written by two people and mainly narrated the work of the envoy delegation) but it has a richer content than NVQDFYJ, and greater cultural and historical values. In addition, it better captures the research interest of international scholars. Of course, if both books are combined, it will have the effect of supplementing and correcting each other on historical events in Sino – Vietnamese relations in modern times.

NVT is not only a record of the events that took place during the embassy trip but also expressed its author's personal thoughts about those events. This can be considered the biggest difference between the two diaries. At this point, author Wang (2012: 58) said that: “Luckily this difference between the two diaries supplements, provides true and complete historical events for researchers to study the event later”.

Through the contact with Japanese intellectuals and monks, especially, the first of the prince of the Japanese Navy - Shōun Sone, the Vietnamese envoy has had a profound change in awareness. When listening to Shōun Sone's mention of the policy to establish

Xingya Hui to unite countries in Asia to oppose the powerful Western countries, the Vietnamese delegation sympathized with this policy. The support of Shōun Sone's policy in establishing Xingya Hui and the recognition of similarities between Vietnam and Japan, associated with the concept of “同文同種the same language and the same race”<sup>8</sup>, are considered a new step in awareness of Vietnamese envoys, creating a new way of thinking regarding the act of saving and ensuring the survival of East Asian countries. Unfortunately, the French colonialists did not allow Vietnam to have enough time to study in the West. In 1884 after the Treaty of Patenôtre, France forced the Nguyen Dynasty to admit its protection throughout the territory. In that context, Nguyễn Thuật's desire of building a rich nation and a powerful defense, in sync with those who advocated the study of “Yangwu”, was not fulfilled. “Xingya Hui” - The Union of Asian countries to fight against the invasion of Western countries was only a short but beautiful dream.

## V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the trip of the envoys of the Nguyen Dynasty to China in 1883 is reflected quite specifically in the two works: NVQDFYJ of Phạm Thân Duật along with Nguyễn Thuật, and NVT of Nguyễn Thuật. The contents of the two diaries provide a lot of information about the mission to China of the Vietnamese envoy of the Nguyen dynasty, about the cultural exchange between Vietnam, China and Japan, about the operation of the Zhaoshang Department of the Qing Dynasty, about the form and nature of “Tianzi 天子” - “Zhuhou 諸侯” relationship between Vietnam and China,... The difference between the two diaries, one with personal character (NVT) and the other with state character (NVQDFYJ), also supplements and provides more precisely and completely historical events about the embassy trip in 1883 of the Nguyen dynasty's envoys. With such rich historical materials and multifaceted values in research, NVT and NVQDFYJ are important sources of materials

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<sup>8</sup> Vietnamese scholars used similar words to describe the close exchange of Vietnam and Japan including cultural *similarities*

in the study of embassy poetry in particular and Sino - Vietnamese relations in medieval and modern times in general.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

NVQDFYJ	<i>Notes of Voyage to Qing Dynasty in The First Year of Jianfu</i>
NVT	<i>Notes of Voyage to Tianjin</i>
<i>Voyage to Tianjin</i>	Nguyen Thuat compiles 阮述撰, Chen Chingho notes 陈荆和编注. 1980. <i>Nguyễn Thuật: Notes</i>

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